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DAVID WETZEL

ANY MOUSE CAN BITE A LION'S TAIL

Recent Research on the Concert of Europe

In the March 1977 issue of »The Journal of Modern History«, a special edition devoted to the works of A.J.P. Taylor, Donald Cameron Watt, in his piece disagreeing with Taylor on the origins of the Second World War, conceded: »Any second-year philosophy undergraduate can refute Descartes and Leibniz, perceive inconsistencies in Kant, and irrationality in Wittgenstein. Any mouse can bite a lion's tail. But the mouse remains a mouse and the lion a lion«¹. Reading this, one is tempted to credit Watt with civility, discretion, and courtesy, which had not always been true in the case he was discussing because Taylor's work had, for decades, been the subject of furious controversy, a fact that was not lost on the honoree who, in the article he himself wrote for the same issue, remarked: »When criticizing an author I have never descended to personal abuse. I cannot say the same about my critics«².

Matthias Schulz³ in this book is scrupulously polite and correct, most of the time at any rate, when disagreeing with those whose works he criticizes, but he is at pains to stress these disagreements all the same – indeed, almost from the very first page. The book, twelve years in the making, stems from his postdoctoral thesis, completed, one gathers from the preface, in 2001–2002 at the University of Rostock, then abridged and revised in 2006–2007 at the Institute für Europäische Geschichte at the University of Mainz where, in 2007, it took its place as volume 21 of the series entitled »Studien zur Internationalen Geschichte«. It is addressed to the forty-five year period from 1815 to 1860 – to the period, that is, between the Congress of Vienna and the decisive year of Italian unification. The book consists of three parts, the first of which deals with the formation, expansion, and institutionalization of the European Concert between 1815 and 1848; the second covers the years from 1848 to 1860 and the series of important wars, revolutions, and other disorders that took place during that period: first and foremost the Crimean War (1853–1856); the crisis between Switzerland and Prussia over Neuenberg and the latter's ultimate inclusion in the Swiss Confederation (1856–1857); the dispute between (largely) Turkey and France over the Moldavian elections of 1858 that paved the way for the independence of Rumania; and finally, the decisive events related to the unification of Italy: the Austro-Sardinian War of 1859, the expedition of Giuseppe Garibaldi, the Italian romantic and adventurer, to Sicily in May 1860, the Sardinian invasion of the papal states four months later, and the meeting between King Victor Emanuel and Garibaldi that resulted in the formation of the Kingdom of Italy; section three, the shortest, deals with the refinement of the norms of Concert discourse, offering observations on how it was able to manage change,

- 1 Donald Cameron WATT, Some Aspects of A.J.P. Taylor's Work as a Diplomatic Historian, in: *The Journal of Modern History* 41 (1977), p. 19–33, p. 33.
- 2 A.J.P. TAYLOR, Accident Prone or What Happened Next?, in: *ibid.*, p. 1–18, p. 14.
- 3 Matthias SCHULZ, *Normen und Praxis. Das europäische Konzert der Großmächte als Sicherheitsrat, 1815–1860*, Munich (Oldenbourg) 2009, XII–726 p., ISBN 978–3–486–58788–3, EUR 79,80.

influence national policies and international disputes, and pointing out, among other things, that the concept of *Sicherheitsrat* (literally, »security council«) taken as a basis for Concert action is one that was, for the most part, conceived reasonably and not extravagantly by its participants.

Schulz's introduction forms the point of departure for a discussion of just what the Concert was, and he defines it quite simply as the system of cooperation among the allies (Great Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia) who defeated France in 1815 (and, later, in 1818, admitted her to their circle) for the purpose of restoring and preserving the peace after the Napoleonic wars and their practice of meeting in conferences rather than bilateral or multilateral negotiations to deal with the problems of general concern. The Concert was more notable for its discord than its harmony but, as Schulz notes, by and large the system worked and prevented the outbreak of a general war on the European continent between 1815 and 1914.

As indicated above, the introduction also serves as a point of departure for a discussion of and disagreement with his predecessors, and here Paul W. Schroeder whose landmark book on »The Transformation of European Politics«⁴, a book that originally prompted Schulz's interest in this subject, clearly occupies the most prominent position. Schulz's disagreements with Schroeder extend over the whole of his book. Sometimes these disagreements are provocative; sometimes they manage to throw light on old problems or offer new ways of looking at them, suggesting hitherto unrecognized aspects, new avenues of approach, bringing into his discussion areas of international history that have been largely passed over, if not ignored altogether. Schulz's portraits are drawn on a wide canvass; his views at times are particularly compelling; and some of his bold and arresting ideas are unquestionably relevant to the world of today. Clearly Matthias Schulz is no mouse. In the end, however, his repeated challenges to Schroeder (and with them his book) fall short in four important ways. These concern the Vienna settlement, the European Concert as it operated between 1823 and 1848, the Crimean War, and the unification of Italy.

To start with the first difficulty: According to Schulz, any reading of the Vienna settlement of 1814–1815 as one that rested on the shared hegemony or imbalance of the two flanking Powers, Britain and Russia, over the other states, Austria, Prussia, and France – as Schroeder has argued⁵ – is misleading and wrong. On the contrary: the Vienna system and the Concert itself was one of cooperation among members.

»Via the Concert, the Great Powers assigned to themselves a collective authority on questions of European politics that excluded the other states. This gave them equal status. That and the practice of making decisions as a single body within the scope of the Concert allowed for the hiding of power imbalances among the Great Powers and the moderation of desire for more power, especially with respect to further territorial acquisition«⁶.

This was, argues Schulz, far from being a system of shared hegemony, and it could not have been because the two hegemonic Powers, Britain and Russia, were not really hegemons. This was, in Britain's case, shown during the Napoleonic wars. Britain, he observes, alone was unable to break Napoleon's continental system. Britain's energies after 1815, he notes, were absorbed by her colonies and by efforts to build up her financial strength. An isolated country

4 Paul W. SCHROEDER, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763–1848*, Oxford 1994.

5 Paul W. SCHROEDER, *Did the Vienna Settlement Rest on a Balance of Power?*, in: ID., *Systems, Stability and Statecraft: Essays on the International History of Modern Europe*, ed. with an introduction by David WETZEL, Robert JERVIS and Jack S. LEVY, New York 2004, p. 37–57.

6 SCHULZ, *Normen und Praxis* (see n. 3), p. 71.

and proud of it, preoccupied, particularly in the years after 1815, with serious domestic unrest (Peterloo, Ireland, Chartism, franchise reform, etc.), Britain, though imposing, was never in a position to dominate the Continent⁷.

Similarly for Russia⁸. For many centuries separated geographically from the development of European civilization and culture, a country with enormously long borders that ran from Alaska to Turkey, consumed with an inordinate fear of revolution within as well as outside them, possessing vast resources but able to mobilize them only with inordinate difficulty, hamstrung by an underdeveloped infrastructure and by a population that was anything but homogenous, Russia, though a great autocracy, was also a country with deep and serious difficulties, and the real power potential of Petersburg after 1815 was limited. Though Russia's army was the largest in Europe, the territory which that army had to defend was vast⁹.

What really existed after 1818 (when France joined the Concert) was a »moral pentarchy«, as Metternich once described the system to Tsar Alexander I, and which the British foreign minister, Robert Castlereagh, toggling back and forth between enthusiasm and caution, once pictured to his Prime Minister, Robert Earl of Liverpool, as a European Government, giving to the Great Powers the efficiency and almost simplicity of a single state¹⁰. For Schulz, the system worked because a balance of power really existed – that is, »no one state«, as Taylor once put it, »was strong enough to eat up all the rest«¹¹. In practice the balance of power restrained – and for a time blocked and thwarted – attempts for supremacy in Europe, and sovereigns worked hand in hand with each other against war, revolution, liberalism, nationalism, and socialism. Once the spirit of cooperation declined, as new energies surfaced and the balance of power changed, the Vienna system faltered, but it was revived by an infusion of energy from the two western Powers, first Britain then France.

»Above all the authors of the peace settlement strived to put a stop to the most important causes of wars in the 18th century: stop dynastic quarrels, wars of succession and revolution via the anti-revolutionary legitimacy argument; [...] stop territorial and legal uncertainties through common recognition of borders as well as through collective guarantees of the independence and neutrality of Switzerland and the free city of Cracow; stop mistrust through trust-building measures, simplifying diplomatic protocols and monarchical ceremonials, increasing the frequency of meetings of sovereigns [...] in time of peace; and stop miscellaneous conflicts [...] by discussion of European problems during congresses or conferences if need arose«¹².

Much of what Schulz says is true, but he overstates some factors and ignores others. The Vienna System was far more than a set of arrangements and practices. Unlike the aftermath of the two World Wars of the twentieth century when the difficulties of keeping coalitions together was far more sadly in evidence than they were in 1815, the statesmen of 1814 had *interests* in common that enabled them to surmount differences among them that they carried over into the post-war era. The statesmen of Vienna recognized that the concept of *interest* itself required a certain sort of disciplinary restriction to avoid serious error and distortion both in understanding and in application, and we find this in their observance of the values of prudence, of proportionality (action should bear a reasonable relationship to its presumed consequences) and of international law. Above all, they supported the devices, mechanisms, practices, and measures Schulz lists

7 Ibid., p. 49.

8 Ibid., p. 49–52.

9 Ibid., p. 46–53.

10 Ibid., p. 70.

11 A.J.P. TAYLOR, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848–1918*, Oxford 1984, p. XIX.

12 SCHULZ, *Normen und Praxis* (see n. 3), p. 71.

not because they were worn down by exhaustion, but because the experience of trying to deal with Napoleon, who nearly destroyed them, had taught them that things could not go on as they had and, in an effort to put things right, they were ready to build a new order and take steps to see that it was preserved.

Moreover, Schulz's idea of the power constellation, and particularly his picture of the flanking Powers after 1815, can be challenged (indeed stood on its head) on at least three grounds. The first has to do with power itself. Consider Britain. Thanks to her naval power, she dominated the seas; she was able to acquire territory in almost every part of the world while keeping everything she desired. She dominated the world in finance, in commerce, and in trade. Or take Russia. The convulsions of violence and confusion in 1812–1813 brought Russia robust political health and the almost unlimited centralization (especially after 1825) of autocratic power and of political thought. Russia's army *was*, and one might add not without justification, the most feared in the world. Her population was the world's largest; her bureaucracy better than most on the continent, excluding perhaps Prussia's.

The second weakness in Schulz's argument has to do with geography. As Great Powers in a unique geographic position and heirs to extensive involvements flowing from that position, Russia and Britain were in a position to develop their political interests in ways quite different from those of the Powers on the continent. The Vienna settlement left the two flanking Powers unquestionable hegemony, their positions secure, consolidated, invincible – Russia in Persia, central Asia, the Far East, and North America; Britain all over the globe. By the same token, geography also rendered the continental Powers – France, Prussia, and Austria – weak, exposed, and vulnerable to attack from one another.

This point is closely linked to a third Schulz overlooks. Britain and Russia possessed something the continental Powers did not – namely, flexibility when it came to alliances. They did not need them and could design their respective policies without them. This was not true on the continent. The tension between Austria and Prussia, so characteristic of the eighteenth century, undoubtedly relaxed between 1815 and 1848; the two were usually allies during this period and linked to one or the other flanking Powers for support, but such support was not always forthcoming. Austria, for example, would have liked British support against a possible French attack in Italy in 1830–1832, but Britain was not in a position to help, and Russia was tied down in Poland. As for France, she repeatedly (and usually unsuccessfully) sought alliances with Britain and Russia, but such attempts almost always ran into the sand. Keeping Austria and Prussia in a state of permanent enmity with each other and dependent on Russia for support was a staple of Russian policy in the eighteenth century, but less so in the nineteenth – Alexander I's advisors, military and civilian, sometimes wanted to retract, if they could, some of the more conciliatory steps he took toward Austria and Prussia but routinely failed, due primarily, if not exclusively, to the spirit of monarchical solidarity with which the Holy Alliance – the alliance of Russia, Austria, and Prussia of September 1815 – was suffused and which Alexander observed. In any case, Austria and Prussia both knew that neither could scrape through any challenge to their security without assistance from each other or the Germanic confederation – a point illustrated by the revolutions of 1820–1821, those of 1830–1832, and most vividly, by the war scare of 1840–1841, when France threatened neither Britain nor Russia, her true antagonists, but Prussia. *Pace* Schulz the system established at Vienna was one in which the two strongest Powers in the world, far less vulnerable than the other three, began to work together to solve common problems, as both did during the major crises between 1848 and 1852. That there was a Concert of Europe and that it played a vital, indispensable role in managing European affairs cannot be doubted, but the idea that its members possessed anything resembling the real equality Schulz describes is one that can be ruled out with great definiteness.

These considerations lead into Schulz's next three chapters on the Concert during the period from 1818 to 1848. While little of his material will be new to the reader who has followed the

history of the many of the accounts of this period, his chapters are a useful summary of that far greater body of material. Here Schulz sees two profoundly rooted but conflicting strains beating in the breasts of the two Powers who were, during these years, most extensively engaged in the process – Austria, whose conception was essentially static and dogmatic in her attachment to the status quo, and Britain, whose conception was essentially elastic and who saw the Concert as a tool to manage international change. (This view is not, it should be pointed out, entirely new. It has been expressed before in one form or another by historians like H.W.V. Temperley whose articles, though not his book, on the Crimean War Schulz cites). In this second section, Schulz, again disagreeing with Schroeder over how the Concert was managed, seeks to show how deep this schism was.

Schulz believes that Castlereagh (to some extent), but more so his successors George Canning and especially John Henry Temple, Lord Palmerston, and later William Ewart Gladstone (whose view of the Concert Schulz discusses in his conclusion), embodied this more flexible approach which took account of the emergence of forces like nationalism and liberalism and channeled them constructively into dynamic but manageable forces that helped preserve the general peace. Whether this view of the Concert was a correct one will be considered later. But Schulz, though disagreeing with Schroeder about who was in charge, shows that the Concert, in whatever form, was remarkably successful, between 1820 and 1848, in the handling and containing of international crises and preventing them from escalating into the kind of wars that plagued Europe under Napoleon from 1802 to 1815: the revolts in Spain, Naples, and Piedmont in 1820–1821; the crisis over Greece from 1821 to 1825; the revolutions against Spanish and Portuguese rule in Latin America; the Greek crisis of 1826–1829; the revolutions of 1830; the Eastern crisis of 1832–1841; similar disturbances of the 1830s and 1840s, including the rising in Galicia in 1846 and the resulting Austrian annexation of Cracow with Russian approval, an operation Schulz denounces as an example of an »unholy alliance«¹³ – a point, one might add, that could hardly be more debatable (among other things Metternich was loath to violate a central provision of the Vienna treaty and his fear of adding more Poles to a monarchy already teeming with unrest in Hungary and Lombardy was anything but insincere); and the Swiss Civil War (*Sonderbund*) of 1847.

Schulz believes that preservation of peace did not mean that the Concert was immune from discord and dissension among its participants. Quite the contrary. After 1823, there developed a schism, as he puts it, between the reactionary Powers of Central and Eastern Europe (chiefly Russia and Austria) and the more liberal-constitutionalist Powers, Britain and France in the West.

»Action of the majority of Concert members against revolution in third party states existed only in the years between 1818 and 1823 as the basis for Concert diplomacy based on the unity of the three eastern Powers and the increasingly conservative outlook of the Russian tsar. Great Britain from the beginning was against anti-revolutionary intervention, but she had to yield to majority rule until the rise of her own principle of non-intervention, unless in cases of danger to international security or equilibrium which would warrant an intervention in the internal affairs of another state. Then, after 1823, anti-revolutionary intervention receded into the background as a Concert practice [...]. Between 1823 and 1841, the principle of Concert diplomacy and practice was geared toward maintaining balance/equilibrium; the goal of action was to preserve this equilibrium and more and more to maintain the independence of states as the British understood this«¹⁴.

13 SCHULZ, *Normen und Praxis* (see n. 3), p. 132.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 144.

Britain, therefore, became the new manager of the Concert. The prior manager, Austria, was too focused on revolution, too tied to the status quo, too reactionary to be effective. The Concert under Metternich was never that effective anyway. Metternich exaggerated the threat of revolution everywhere, especially in France, and his policy of governing was always and reflexively repressive. Metternich, argues Schulz, abused Canning for putting British interests first yet was ready to wreck his conservative partnership with Russia for the sake of Austrian interests in the Balkans¹⁵.

All this is accurate and correct. The effect and direction of Metternich's efforts after 1819 in Germany, Italy, and Poland bear an air of excited discovery that distorted and exaggerated the revolutionary dangers and undermined the 1815 arrangements by tying them to repressive methods. On the other hand – a point Schulz seems not to notice or emphasize – the reckless nationalist ideologues and revolutionaries whom Metternich opposed threatened stability even more than he and his system did, and Britain in this period (as in later ones) was often long on words but short on action. And there is a deeper flaw in Schulz's argument. The ideological rifts were never as intense as he describes. They produced fierce debate and argument, but all the fighting was done on paper. And, what is more, they transcended ideological divides. They were, that is, as much *among* the conservative and liberal Powers as between them. Witness the repeated Russo-Austrian disputes over the Balkans and Turkey and the Anglo-French splits over the same area but also over Belgium, Italy, France, Germany and, above all, Spain. Powers, regardless of their ideological orientation, routinely intervened in foreign revolutions in areas important to them or they did not. The most reactionary regime in Europe between 1815 and 1848 – the France of Charles X (1824–1830) – had the most sweeping revolutionary ambitions.

The second (and central) section of Schulz's book is entitled »Challenge and Integration«, and it deals with the response of the European Concert to the great challenges that arose between 1848 and 1860: the revolutions of 1848, the Crimean War, the crisis over Neuenburg, the creation of an independent Rumania, and the unification of Italy.

Schulz's views on the Crimean War deserve a special section of this review since they pose a clear challenge not only to those of Schroeder but also to Norman Rich, and to a lesser extent, Anselm Doering-Manteuffel (one of the editors of this series) and Winfried Baumgart who have seen the war as one that was clearly avoidable and largely brought on by the Western Powers with Britain in the lead¹⁶. According to Schulz's interpretation of what happened, the war was fought »to contain the Bear; to Europeanize the Eastern Question«¹⁷; and, above all, to put down Russian aggression. The sources of this aggression were many, and Russian policy was not always consistent. There were, in particular, two influential factions, one composed of people who were reasonably content with Russia's international position, who wanted to see peace preserved in her external relationships and who favored, for this reason, the continued cultivation of a peaceful relationship with the Porte. Opposed to this conservative, internationally minded, and generally Westernized faction, there was one of contrary disposition, made up of several elements united by the spirit of active – sometimes exalted – nationalism, eager to see Russian prestige elevated and inclined – all of them – to look to the southwest, to the Balkans, the Ottoman Empire, and the Straits as a theater for what they envisaged as the dramatic

15 Ibid., p. 76–102.

16 Paul W. SCHROEDER, *Austria, Great Britain, and the Crimean War: the Destruction of the European Concert*, Ithaca 1972; Norman RICH, *Why the Crimean War: A Cautionary Tale*, Hanover, London 1985; Anselm DOERING-MANTEUFFEL, *Großbritannien und die Transformation des europäischen Staatensystems 1850–1851*, in: Peter KRÜGER (ed.), *Kontinuität und Wandel in der Staatenordnung der Neuzeit: Beiträge zur Geschichte des internationalen Systems*, Marburg 1991, p. 153–70; Winfried BAUMGART, *Der Friede von Paris 1856. Studien zum Verhältnis von Kriegführung, Politik und Friedensbewahrung*, Munich 1972.

17 SCHULZ, *Normen und Praxis* (see n. 3), chapter title, p. 296.

expansion of Russian power and influence¹⁸. It was this faction that brought on the Crimean War by undertaking a series of dangerous actions – above all, by sending to Constantinople in February of 1853 a special mission the purpose of which was to secure by a bilateral treaty a Russian protectorate over the Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire. What lay behind the Russian demand? Why did the Russians bring it forward? Schulz's answer: »The tsar wanted a free hand in the Ottoman Empire«. Of course, he would have preferred to accomplish this »without war with France and England«¹⁹. But his actions were reckless in the extreme and instead provoked a hostile coalition against Russia led by Britain and France who were prepared to go to war rather than let him have his way.

In order to avoid this, negotiations were hastily put in hand by the other European Powers, but particularly the Austrians, whose reaction to the above-mentioned developments was, since their empire touched both Turkey and Russia, of vital importance. These negotiations were complex and confused, but in the end they were successful, and the Russians consented to deal with Turkey, not unilaterally, but through the other Powers of Europe. This consent was embodied in the Vienna Note of June 1853, a document that forced concessions upon the Turks. The Turks, however, dug in their heels. Encouraged – pushed would be a truer word – by the British ambassador, Stratford de Redcliffe, they insisted on amendments to the note, an action that prompted the Russians to break off and reject it. The Turkish decision, says Schulz, was clearly the right one because the Russians were bent on cheating all along. The Tsar accepted the note but the Russian government »twisted the concessions in a publicity stunt [as early as 3 August] to mean that diplomats had acknowledged its alleged claims«²⁰. The Russians then went further and insisted, at the end of September, on a »violent interpretation« that gave them the unfounded rights they had been seeking all along. This was the point of no return and there followed a series of events – a Turkish declaration of war against Russia, Russia's destruction of the Turkish Black Sea fleet, movement of the western fleets into the Black Sea in support of Turkey, and finally a declaration of war against Russia by the Western Powers. At bottom, the war was fought to preserve the European balance of power. This was secured by the defeat of the Russian armies in the Crimea and by the destruction, on 8 November 1855, of the great Russian naval fortress at Sebastopol. More than that, Russia's military resources were exhausted; her economy was in dire straits; and she fell out of Europe as a Great Power²¹.

This view unquestionably presents a coherent set of theses; it is based on intimate acquaintance with the outstanding secondary literature and much work in original source materials (though the tone is at times decidedly and gratuitously confrontational – dismissing as »apologetic«²² Rich's views on Russian policy is bit extreme). So what's wrong with it? As a characterization of the behavior of the major actors, a great deal. In particular, the picture Schulz paints of Russia as a rapacious Power with inordinate and unscrupulous aims, a hungry wolf in the midst of sheep (to change his metaphor), is a blanket explanation that cannot be accepted without major reservations. Granted, the Russian demand for a protectorate over the Orthodox subjects of Turkey roused Western and Turkish fears. The question is how immediate was this threat in 1853? Was the tsar bent on an expansionist policy at Turkey's expense – no matter what? Was he unwilling to settle his problems with the Ottoman Empire by negotiation? The answer is, I think, clearly in the negative.

One is moved to recall at this point the state of mind prevailing as early as 1829, shortly before the end of the Russo-Turkish War, in prominent parts of Russian officialdom (and

18 Ibid., p. 296–306.

19 Ibid., p. 311.

20 Ibid., p. 309.

21 Ibid., p. 341–348.

22 Ibid., p. 305.

expressed in a powerful memorandum to Nicholas I in that year), as to the dangers that an aggressive Russian policy in the Near East would invite – a view shared by the tsar. His view of politics was, after all, rooted in the Decembrist revolt of 1825 which had nearly cost him his throne. Throughout the two decades following the war of 1828–1829, Nicholas saw the sultan as a legitimate authority whose rule had to be protected against revolutionaries. In a word, he accepted his advisers' views and followed a policy of caution and restraint toward the Porte – one that kept, or helped to keep, it alive and intact.

Schulz might, of course, retort, by saying, »so what?« Russian policy might have been restrained before 1853 (though most of the time – e.g., the crises of 1827–1829, 1833, 1839–1841 he argues the contrary). It became expansionist after that date, and as proof of this we have to look no further than the 1853 demand for the religious protectorate. How valid is that view? Not very. Why? For five reasons. First – a fact Schulz downplays – the demand was originally proposed by the Russian chancellor, Count Robert Nesselrode (not someone to be counted among the expansionist wing of the tsar's advisors), as the least offensive means of restoring Russian honor and prestige in the wake of a Turkish collapse before the French whose ruler Napoleon III – by his very title – symbolized revolution and who had, in 1852, unchained the crisis by sending a warship to Constantinople. Second, the Russians were quick to perceive the dangers their demand posed once it was launched, promptly dropped it, and asked for a *note* containing promises from the sultan that the Orthodox subjects of the Porte would enjoy the same rights they had enjoyed previously. Third, the Vienna Note (which Russia had accepted) – really Concert diplomacy in action – would have settled the crisis, for it was inconceivable that the Turks, however fanatical or bellicose, would have rejected a note that had been accepted by all the Powers of Europe; the note was, as Schulz himself observes, killed by Redcliffe who – a fact he overlooks – saw the crisis as a contest between the tsar and himself and who, in his exaggerated reactions, professed to see all Russian behavior as evidence that the tsar was preparing an attack on Turkey (or planning to carve her up) and who explicitly warned the Turks that *any* agreement with the Russians was a trap, a smokescreen for Russian intervention in their affairs. Fourth, the Russian actions of August and September and particularly the »violent interpretation« of the Vienna Note were not really offensive or aggressive; Nicholas was reacting to what he regarded as clear Turkish provocations and, in any case, promptly disavowed his »violent interpretation« when he saw that he was pressing matters too far. Fifth, Palmerston, at the time British home secretary, had determined beforehand that the Powers could never force the Vienna Note upon the Turks in the event they rejected it as indeed he hoped they would.

This last point leads to a more general objection. Schulz's view that the British aim was to resolve the crisis through Concert diplomacy simply flies in the face of the facts. This may have been true at the beginning of the crisis, but the aim of the most powerful of the British ministers, the men who got their way in the end, was, from start to finish, one of confrontation not cooperation with Russia. What were their aims? Palmerston laid them down to the British cabinet as early as 19 March 1854 in a statement as his »beau idéal« of what should result from a war between the Western Powers and Russia:

»Aaland and Finland to be restored to Sweden. Some of the German provinces on the Baltic ceded to Prussia. A substantive kingdom of Poland reestablished as a barrier between Germany and Russia. Wallachia and Moldavia and the mouth of the Danube to be given to Austria. Lombardy and Venetia to be set free of Austrian rule and either made independent states or incorporated with Piedmont. The Crimea, Circassia, and Georgia wrested from Russia – the Crimea and Georgia given to Turkey and Circassia either independent or connected with the Sultan as Suzerain«²³.

23 Norman RICH, *Great Power Diplomacy, 1814–1914*, New York 1992, p. 113.

Palmerston's pronouncements may stand in the historical record as one more striking example of the danger of extravagant and uncompromising objectives by Great Powers on major questions of international relations. That they were not merely a jumble of exuberant thoughts tossed off in the feverish enthusiasm that arose in Britain in the months preceding the outbreak of the war is shown by the fact that he expressed these same ideas repeatedly during the war itself and that he set his face against making peace with Russia until at least a substantial part of those objectives had been attained. Were the statements of Palmerston those of someone who wanted to resolve the crisis by Concert diplomacy? The question answers itself.

In any case, Schulz concludes his discussion of the war with an announcement that it was an unmitigated success and that the Concert, far from being destroyed, as Schroeder and Rich have argued²⁴, was preserved, indeed strengthened at the Congress of Paris (January–March 1856)²⁵. Russian aggression was checked. Russia renounced her right to a protectorate over Turkey's Orthodox subjects (a foregone conclusion; the tsar had already conceded this when he accepted the Vienna Note and again when he repudiated the »violent interpretation«. Did it really take a war to force upon him a concession he was ready to make even before it started?). Russia's threat to the Danubian principalities was eliminated, much to the satisfaction of their inhabitants, the Rumanians, who would soon be free to pursue their own ambitions. Additional stimulus was given Rumanian ambitions by the cession by Russia of Bessarabia. Turkish independence was preserved by the tripartite Anglo-French-Austrian treaty of 15 April 1856, which Schulz hails as a milestone in the history of international affairs. Thus: »The Vienna Legal System was [...] further developed via the European Concert and the Paris Congress. As to the law of nations, what is of significance is that the Western Powers defended the sovereignty and integrity of traditionally non-European powers and strived to reach a balance between respect for sovereignty and the right to intervene in what we today would call human rights issues«²⁶.

Yet this view, too, is easily challenged. The treaty of 15 April 1856 was largely window dressing, for the only party committed to it was Austria. It was what the Austrians had really wanted, a new Concert with the Western Powers that would check Russia in the Balkans, preserve the Ottoman Empire, and gain Anglo-French support for the status quo in Europe against revolutionary challenges from Prussia in Germany and Piedmont-Sardinia in Italy. Austria's hope was, of course, all moonshine. Napoleon III's energies would soon be bound up in Italy; this involved an anti-Austrian policy from the start. The British, for their part, became anxious over what they perceived was a new threat of French hegemony on the continent, but they were more absorbed by disturbances in India and Persia and turned their back on Europe. Austria was isolated and left to the tender mercies of Prussia in Germany and Piedmont-Sardinia in Italy. Four decades of peace would be followed by four wars during the next fifteen years in which the existing order of Europe would be blown sky high.

Nor is it correct to say that the Russian threat to Turkey dissolved as a result of the Crimean War; on the contrary, that threat remained as if the British and French armies had never fired a shot, and indeed a principal effect of the war was to convince the Russians, previously split over the issue, that the British were their eternal enemies and to drive Russia forward in Asia and the Caucasus. Though Russian pressure on Turkey relaxed for the next two decades, Turkey secured no reliable ally against Russia in Europe. In 1870 while France and Prussia fought each other over the question of Germany, Russia denounced the Black Sea clauses, the harshest provisions of the peace, by which the Black Sea had been neutralized; by 1877 Russia was again at war with Turkey; in 1878 Russia regained large chunks of Bessarabia that she had ceded to

24 RICH, *Why the Crimean War* (see n. 16), p. 199–209; SCHROEDER, *Austria, Great-Britain and the Crimean War* (see n. 16), p. 392–427.

25 SCHULZ, *Normen und Praxis* (see n. 3), p. 348–353.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 350.

Turkey as a result of her defeat in 1856. The British themselves were astonished at how little the war had accomplished, and they exaggerated the speed of Russia's recovery, as Palmerston, not someone inclined to underestimate his achievements, bore witness when he laid down on 7 March 1856: »The treaty will leave Russia a formidable Power in a few years when she shall by wiser internal policy have developed her immense natural resources to place in danger the great interests of Europe«²⁷.

Finally, it is simply not true that the Crimean War paved the way for a liberal Concert under French leadership. The Crimean War indeed made France the strongest Power in Europe. But France's position was deceptive. The British feared French ambitions in Italy; the Austrians feared French ambitions in Italy and Germany; the Russians feared French ambitions in Poland, which Napoleon wanted to reconstruct. Indeed France was as isolated among the Great Powers as Austria, and Napoleon's dream of a Europe reconstructed along national lines suggests he was aware of precisely that. In the end he succeeded in creating two national states on his own border, one of which would defeat him in war and overthrow his empire.

Schulz is surely correct to say that the Crimean War paved the way for the unification of Rumania under French auspices in 1858–1859²⁸. The damage to the Ottoman Empire was trifling since the principalities had long broken away from Turkish control. The problem a united Rumania posed for Austria was far greater, for there was certain to be a spill-over effect on that most restless nationality to live under Habsburg rule: the Hungarians (Transylvania had a large Rumanian minority). But by this time Schulz believes that the Austrians were too insular in outlook, too turned in on themselves to deal constructively with any of the great changes that came over Europe in the wake of the Crimean War²⁹.

This view he presents quite clearly in the bulk of the final chapter of the second part of his book that is devoted to the unification of Italy. Here there is no explicit challenge to Schroeder, though it is clear from what Schroeder has to say in his book on the Crimean War, and specifically his central argument in that final chapter of that book, addressed to »The Outcome for Europe: Confrontation or Concert«³⁰ – that, among other things, Austria was, from a number of standpoints, better suited to lead the Concert than was Great Britain – is an argument for which Schulz has no absolutely no use.

Not that Schulz is altogether wrong about important aspects of the Italian unification. His treatment of Count Carl Ferdinand Buol, the Austrian chancellor, is harsh but surely not unjustified. Buol's policy during the Crimean War estranged both Russia and the Western Powers and left Austria isolated. His policy leading up the war with France in 1859 was defective to the point of mindlessness. He squandered numerous opportunities that might have saved Austria from war. Most inexcusable was his ultimatum to Sardinia demanding that she disarm as the price of admission to a conference after Sardinia had already agreed to do just that – a demand due, one is left to conclude, to an arrogant and utterly unjustified overconfidence in Austria's military capabilities, his conviction that Napoleon III would, when all was said and done, shrink from war with Austria, and his belief that Austria could count on the unstinting support of the states of the Germanic Confederation (possibly even including Prussia) if war came. Of course, this was a pipe dream, as Schulz points out, and his indictment of Austrian policy before the war (and after it) is blistering: »Vienna's position was absurd«³¹. Sardinia was a

27 Palmerston to Clarendon, 7 March 1856, see TAYLOR, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe* (see n. 16), p. 88, n. 1.

28 SCHULZ, *Normen und Praxis* (see n. 3), p. 439–442.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 481–491.

30 SCHROEDER, *Austria, Great Britain and the Crimean War* (see n. 16), p. 404–412, 417–419, 424–425.

31 SCHULZ, *Normen und Praxis* (see n. 3), p. 476.

small state, not a Great Power, but the Powers, with Austria at their head, had recognized that small states could be admitted to congresses as early as 1818 in the Aix la Chapelle protocol and later at the congress of Laibach in 1821. The Austrians were hiding their heads in the sand or, to change the metaphor, holding their noses in the air. They were denying to Sardinia rights they themselves had conferred on similar states at earlier times.

Of course, the question arises: were there deeper motives underlying Buol's calculations? Granted, it is always hard to find rational explanations for stupidity, but a plausible explanation is at hand (though Schulz never brings it forward). It is this. For Buol, the Italian question surely involved more than the treaties of Laibach and Aix la Chapelle. Or rather it involved precisely that, or part of it: *treaties*. »The Habsburg Monarchy«, A.J.P. Taylor (not someone to be counted among Austria's sympathizers) once wrote, »rested on tradition, on dynastic rights, on international treaties; the rule of law was essential to it«³². Precisely. So firmly was Buol convinced of the righteousness of Austria's cause that he was blind to everything else. He saw Count Camillo di Cavour, the Sardinian minister-president, as an international criminal, and while this was surely an exaggeration, the suspicion was not altogether unjustified. The war of 1859 was, after all, a conspiracy hatched the year before between Napoleon III and Cavour, and Cavour's real interest was, of course, not in unifying Italy at all but in extending the power of the house of Savoy across the entire northern half of the Italian peninsula; in establishing a liberal-constitutional pro-French monarchy there; and above all, in a blaze of military glory, driving Austria out of Italy and, if possible, destroying her as a Great Power. Buol believed this; believed, in other words, that because Austria's cause was so plainly right and just and legal and moral and so fundamental for European stability, Europe was, sooner or later, bound to come to its senses and support Austria. For Buol, as it was for so many Austrians who came before him, the Italian question was, in other words, a choice between right and wrong, between good and bad, between light and darkness, even perhaps between life and death.

In any case, Buol's ultimatum was the point of no return, and the events that constitute the rest of story – the Austrian defeat in the war of 1859; the pact of Villafranca that ended it; Cavour's resignation and return to office; Sardinia's annexation of the states of central Italy and her cession to France of Nice and Savoy; Garibaldi's expedition to Sicily, his move across the Straits of Messina and sweep up the Italian peninsula; Cavour's anxieties, his meeting with Napoleon at Chambéry, his attempt to stir up insurrection in the papal states and then sending in the Sardinian army to annex them when that attempt failed; and finally King Victor Emanuel's meeting with Garibaldi at Teano on 26 October 1860 and Turin's proclamation on 8 February 1861 of the Kingdom of Italy – all these events are so well known as to require no recapitulation here. Schulz's account of these events is clear, dispassionate, and on the whole, balanced though clearly unsympathetic to Austria. In his view none of these things was fore-ordained. Austria might, he avers, have avoided disaster had she listened to the wise counsel emanating from many capitals, London most of all. But to all such counsel she turned a deaf ear; hence the size – and indeed the source – of her disaster. Particularly important is the stress Schulz lays on the voice of Palmerston who, as a member of the opposition, laid down in Parliament on 8 August 1859: »I have always maintained – and I maintain still – that, although Austria has a strict right to her possessions in Italy, she would be stronger if she had no possessions there [...]. They do not add to her strength but expose her to attack; they are a source not only of military weakness but of moral injury«³³. What a remarkable words, these – remarkable from the standpoint of the person from whose lips they emanated, even more remarkable for the host of questions to which it gives rise! Among others:

32 A.J.P. TAYLOR, *The Habsburg Monarchy*, Middlesex 1981, p. 41.

33 SCHULZ, *Normen und Praxis* (see n. 3), p. 606.

1. Was Palmerston talking at this juncture as a prudent manager of the international system, attempting to propose a serious solution to a dangerous problem and willing to take responsibility for his advice and pressure Austria? Or was he playing, as Jonathan Parry and others have argued many British liberals did in the nineteenth century, to British political sympathies, being liberal outside England in order to avoid being liberal (electoral reform, Ireland, etc.) inside³⁴? Palmerston, in particular (and Gladstone after him), had a fondness for hurling just such semantic challenges at foreign statesmen, thereby placing himself in a graceful position before domestic British opinion and reaping whatever political fruits were to be derived from the somewhat grudging and embarrassed responses these challenges usually evoked.

2. Did Palmerston really believe that such a transaction would *strengthen* Austria as a Great Power? Would it genuinely satisfy Italian nationalism and reconcile Austria and Italy? (History would, of course, prove the opposite).

3. Did Palmerston consider the domino effects such action would likely have on other nationalities in the empire, the Hungarians most of all?

4. Ditto the question of the final organization of Italy, questions of the Papal State and of southern Italy.

Schulz does not raise any of these questions. But he clearly sees Austria's disregard of Palmerston's counsel as a missed opportunity. »By failing to take this advice«, he comments, »Austria sullied her reputation [...] and was as the root of all evil by her rule at home and by her support of repressive governments in Italy«³⁵.

In any case, according to Schulz, the unification of Italy had, like the Crimean War before it, a salutary effect on the international system, and there is something to be said for this view. With all its defects the final unification of Italy – as secured by the events of 1860 – was achieved with relatively little bloodshed, upheaval and disturbance. Yet the result did more to speed up the overthrow of the old order than pave the way for a new one. There are three reasons for believing this. First, Italy was not unified – she still coveted Venetia and Rome; the return of Nice and Savoy from France; the surrender by Austria of the Trentino, Trieste, and the Dalmatian coast; the southern cantons of Switzerland – all of which were demanded because the majority of the inhabitants were Italians, and all of which were claimed as territory unredeemed (*Italia irredentia*). Second, the unification of Italy left France even more isolated than did the Crimean War – isolated from Britain and Italy over Nice and Savoy; isolated from Austria and Prussia over the war of 1859. Only Russia remained, and Franco-Russian relations would soon founder on the rock of the Polish revolt of 1863. Most important, Cavour's behavior from 1858 to 1861 (the year of his death) however bold and daring it might have been, was so unprincipled as to debase any code of international conduct, a fact Cavour recognized when he once said: »If I had done for myself what I did for my country, oh what a scoundrel I would be«³⁶.

There can be no doubt that Matthias Schulz has, despite what has been said above, produced a major work. The succinctness of his narrative, the mastery of sources used, and his acute use of anecdotes to concentrate attention on the crucial turning points alone make this a valuable contribution to the literature addressed to this subject. But his arguments, at best, extend or modify Schroeder; they certainly do not refute or overthrow him. And there is a more general objection – namely, his failure throughout the book to see things from the standpoint of the losers, from those who had strong and compelling reasons for not seeing the obvious or erring in some way or other. On no topic in the history he tells does his instinctive partisanship come

34 Jonathan PARRY, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830–1886*, Cambridge 2006.

35 SCHULZ, *Normen und Praxis* (see n. 3), p. 606.

36 William ROSCOE THAYER, *The Life and Times of Cavour* 2 vols., Boston 1914, vol. 2, p. XXX.

so naturally to rest as the Austrians. Schulz has no time for what he sees to be their shortcomings – their insensitivity to the beliefs and passions of the age, their incapacity to comprehend aspirations that transcend the ordinary boundaries of received knowledge, prudence, and common sense, their failure to break out of existing orthodoxies to reach a breadth of view and balance of judgment on their rivals – and to understand the limits within which they struggled. One need not agree with the Austrians or judge them to be right or more appealing actors than those who struggled against them. But Schulz never looks deliberately at problems from their point of view, from the other side around, and therefore does not fully understand what the issues really were, what the struggle was all about. And that is the essential limitation of his book. Readers who choose to believe otherwise may take comfort in knowing that the views expressed above are distinctly those of a minority, perhaps even (judging from the glowing reviews this book has received) those of a minority of one.